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USA

# Breaking with labor, Teamster Leader O'Brien Accepts Trump's Invitation to Speak at Republican Convention

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**In a shocking development, the president of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, Sean O'Brien, has accepted an invitation from presidential candidate Donald J. Trump to speak at the Republican National Convention (RNC) July 15-18 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.**

His decision to speak at the convention constitutes a tacit endorsement of the far-right Republican billionaire candidate whose attitudes and policies are racist, xenophobic, misogynistic, and homophobic and whose party is anti-union. It represents a break with the rest of the U.S. labor movement as most unions have historically supported the Democratic Party and have endorsed President Joe Biden.

"Our GREAT convention will unify Americans and demonstrate to the nation's working families they come first," Trump wrote on Truth Social, announcing O'Brien's acceptance. "When I am back in the White House, the hardworking Teamsters, and all working Americans, will once again have a country they can afford to live in and be respected around the world."

O'Brien has given a big boost to Trump. The Teamster leader said he would also like to speak at the Democratic Party convention in August, but having attended the Republican's he may not be welcome.

The Teamsters, with 1.5 million members, is the country's fourth largest union and the biggest private sector union. O'Brien had just announced that the small Amazon Labor Union would affiliate with the Teamsters, and he promised that the Teamster would organize the company's 1,525,000 workers. A development that raised workers' hope.

O'Brien's agreement to speak was a political shock, it was not a surprise. In early January O'Brien went to have dinner with Trump at the former president's mansion at Mar-a-Lago, Florida. At that time, John Palmer, the Teamsters international vice president at-large denounced Trump as "a known union buster, scab, and insurrectionist." Later that month the Teamsters broke with decades of loyalty to the Democrats and gave a \$45,000 donation to the RNC and also has given money to Republican candidates.

Trump's announcement that O'Brien would speak at the Republican Convention coincided with announcements that Timothy Mellon, heir of the \$1.4 billion Mellon family fortune, had given \$50 million to a political action committee supporting Trump. And at the same time Trump, in an appeal to his Evangelical and white Christian nationalist supporters, came out in favor of a new Louisiana state law that requires the Ten Commandments be posted in every classroom. And most important in terms of timing, the announcement comes on the eve of the U.S. presidential debates and will be a talking point for Trump who will use O'Brien's support as proof that he is the candidate of working people. O'Brien's implicit endorsement of Trump is a betrayal of the labor movement's value of democracy, equality, and justice.

No doubt O'Brien's alignment with Trump will be most disappointing to the young leftist labor activists who supported him. Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU) invited O'Brien to speak at its convention and endorsed him for president of the Teamsters while the progressive labor education center Labor Notes also touted him. TDU and Labor Notes brought young union activists from the Democratic Socialist of America into both O'Brien's campaign for Teamster president and into the Teamsters UPS contract campaign.

TDU's leaders believed that after 45 years of organizing—all but five spent in the opposition—by allying with O'Brien, they were finally on the inside and could be more successful organizing the ranks. Maybe so. But at what cost?

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